

PLANTING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN GHANA: INITIAL ATTEMPTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative enquiry set out to collect data on Quality Assurance in Ghanaian Public Universities as well as the Accreditation Board and the Association of African Universities (AAU). The main purpose was to find the achievements and challenges of Quality Assurance in these institutions and how it might be firmly founded at UEW. The findings suggested that achievement included running of workshops and assessments of faculties in some institutions. However, there were also challenges, which included lack of adequate accommodation, funding and resources. The data also suggested that a successful Quality Assurance system based on grass-root participation.

THE BACKGROUND / PROBLEM

Inspite of efforts since 2003, Quality Assurance has not taken firm root at UEW.

Hence the need for this investigation to find a way forward.

THE PURPOSE

Having been freshly appointed as Ag. Director of Quality Assurance at the University of Education, Winneba, in a largely pioneering role, my immediate task was to:

- Explore the concept of Quality Assurance;
- Conduct a baseline qualitative study; and
- Plan and strategize for the operation of Quality Assurance at UEW.

SIGNIFICANCE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. For how long has Quality Assurance been operational in Ghana?
2. What guides its operation in Ghana?
3. What are the challenges of Quality Assurance systems?
4. How might an effective Quality Assurance system be established at the University of Education of Winneba?

INTRODUCTION / LITERATURE REVIEW

This is a qualitative baseline inquiry about Quality Assurance in Ghana. As much as possible the tenets of qualitative inquiry guided this investigation. In the given circumstances, strict confidentiality seems impossible. However, in the write up, an attempt is made to avoid direct reference to institutions by name. This is because I approach this study from a perspective of co-operation, not competition.

This report is the outcome of an investigation of the nature of Quality Assurance in 6 Ghanaian Public Universities. The specific aspects investigated, through the use of interview protocols were as follows:

1. History of Quality Assurance
2. Staffing
3. Major Achievements
4. Major Challenges
5. Crucial Resources
6. Implications :Advice on excellence in a Quality Assurance system

What is Quality Assurance?

In the course of the investigation several concepts regarding Quality Assurance were discovered. In some cases some people took the lead to offer what they thought Quality Assurance was. A gentleman said: Is it about insurance? Others felt Quality Assurance should concern itself with academic matters, while a lady stressed that it should concern itself with everything in the university. Some people had no pretensions. One of such people asked "What work does your office do?" To me this questioner wanted to know the functions of Quality Assurance. In an effort to clarify the concept I present a couple of definitions below:

A Definition of Quality Assurance

Awoyemi (2006:50) states: Quality Assurance is a process and systems put in place to ensure that a product measures up to laid-down specifications and standards, the *inputs* must match the *outputs* in order to justify educational investments". Manford, (2006:58) provides a similar definition, and adds that "there must be acceptable criteria

and standards of good performance to achieve Quality Assurance". The Quality Assurance Programme of the AAU (QAP/ AAU) suggests the coverage of Quality Assurance when it states that it will work for the improvement and assurance of the quality of:

- teaching, learning, and research;
- management and administrative functions/ processes
- institutional policies and strategic plans
- institutional approaches to internationalization; and
- the institutional response to changing social demands (Ekhuaghere 2007:7).

The participants also had their own ideas of what Quality Assurance should be. According to one them, "Quality Assurance tried to identify the weaknesses in our programmes in the universities in our core business, which is teaching and research so that correct measures would be put in place to improve the system".

From the above definitions it seems quite obvious that Quality Assurance is a deliberate and rigorous effort by an institution to evaluate its core business and strive for improvement.

The rigorous nature of this process can be inferred from the following breakdown of performance areas (Ekhuaghere, 2000:16-19):

Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives

Teaching and Learning

Assessment

Research

Organizational and Management Structures

Planning, Budgeting and Human Resources

Campus and Community Relations

Facilities

Norms, Values and Ethics

Gender equity

Each of the topics outlined above is sub-divided extensively and a complete picture is beyond the space and time constraints of this report.

In spite of the above discussion Quality Assurance is flexible enough to allow for differences in assessment criteria between institutions. And examination of *notions of quality* would clarify this assertion.

Notions of Quality

Different institutions might have different notions about quality. These notions guide the systems of Quality Assurance they operate. The Association of African Universities offers the following ideas (Ekhaguere, 2000:7-8):

Some of the variants of the notions of quality that have been discussed in relation to higher education and outcomes include:

1. quality as *fitness for purposes*, in which the search for quality is seen as striving to meet a consumer's needs, expectations or requirements in the delivery of services or products;
2. quality as a *transformation* from one state to another with value-added;
3. quality as *value for money*, as measured by the level of the return on investment, achieved by *minimizing* cost and simultaneously attaining the same or better outcome;
4. quality as *perfection*, perceived as the attainment of a *flawless* product; and
5. quality as *excellence*, through the attainment of exceptionally high standards.

These different notions of quality give rise to correspondingly different *quality indicators* and *quality assessment pathways*. In view of this, every institution must have its *own operational notion of quality*, which will relate its stated vision and mission, and how these are being realized. This is because, no matter how it is defined, *quality* is today one of the criteria for assessing the standing of an HEI and its products, as well as its capacity to fulfill its mission and play its envisaged role in the process of the economic/ technological development of the society in which it is located. It is therefore a matter of strategic importance to all the stake holders of an HEI that the institution has in place a number of operational mechanisms, consistent with the goals of **self-regulation** and **self-evaluation**, for the continual improvement and assurance of the quality of its diverse functions and services.

The effectiveness of the mechanisms as instruments for quality assurance would then be periodically assessed by means of an **external validation process**.

Scope of the Evaluation

In the **Guide** reference will often be made to the **units** of an institution. A **unit** of an institution is any one of the following:

1. a collection of its non-academic service providers, including sections of its administrative structure: this will be called a **non-academic** or **management** unit: and
2. a collection of its colleges, schools, faculties, departments, institutions or research outfits: this will be called an **academic unit**

An institution may opt to undergo an AAU evaluation process in respect of its **units** or the **entire institution** itself. An evaluation process involving the entire institution is called an **institutional evaluation**, an indispensable component of which is the **institutional self-evaluation**. Similarly, an evaluation process may focus only on some *non-academic units*, or *academic units*, or even a **combination** of these. As part of such an evaluation, the units concerned will initially carry out a *self-evaluation process*.

In view of the importance and complexity of the self-evaluation process it would be dealt with in a separate write-up for dissemination to the UEW community. Suffice it to state that the following four questions are its main focus:

- (i) What is the institution trying to do?
- (ii) How is the institution trying to do it?
- (iii) How does the institution know that it is meeting its objectives?
- (iv) What changes is the institution making in order to improve?

In the preface of the AAU Evaluation Guide, Ekhangure (2000) states:

The AAU has put in place a mechanism to validate the optional self-evaluation process undertaken by any of its members. The validation process, and the report arising from it, is not intended to be an endorsement or a denial of endorsement of an institution or any of its units and will not be used by AAU to rank its member institutions or to produce a “league table”. It is a strictly confidential exercise for the benefit of the participating institutions, which may utilize an AAU evaluation report as it pleases.

METHODOLOGY

Yemeh (2004: 63) points out that Langenbach, Vaughn, and Aagaard (1994) discuss two types of researchers. One of these types comprises the traditional natural scientists, who perceive the world as one big puzzle. Their research goal is normally to put the pieces of the puzzle together so that they can see the “whole picture.” They operate in highly controlled laboratory-like settings. The other group of researchers works in the social sciences and the humanities. These

researchers perceive individual, the time and the place. The goal of these qualitative researchers is to consider multiple perspectives and decide “which combination of answers is most appropriate for the setting being examined” (Langenbach et al. 1994, p.11). This study is a qualitative inquiry.

I visited and conducted interviews at six public universities, Association of African Universities and Accreditation Board. Recordings of interviews were made and guided tours of Quality Assurance Facilities undertaken to complement verbal responses by interviewees.

Population / Sample

The following collaborating institutions formed the population of the study:

1. University of Ghana, Legon
2. University of Cape Coast
3. KNUST
4. UDS
5. UMAT
6. UEW
7. Association of African Universities
8. National Accreditation Board

The sample drawn from this population comprised the six Directors of Quality Assurance in the six public universities listed above, as well as an official from each of the Association of African Universities and the National Accreditation Board.

Study Design

The study design took cognizance of the tenets of qualitative enquiry. It respected the confidentiality of participants. Even though the names of institutions were mentioned and specific individuals might even been implied the analysis was such that a reader might not be able to trace an idea to a specific individual. Since the purpose of the study was to gather qualitative data that would help in laying a firm foundation for the operation of quality assurance at UEW, the directors or officers in charge of quality assurance were involved in the study. The idea of the investigation was conceived during a meeting with the national quality assurance committee at the University of Cape Coast on 11th September, 2007. Subsequently telephone conversations were held with all the directors of quality assurance of the six universities in Ghana. Through these conversations visits to the various campuses were arranged during which the participants were interviewed and observations made. These visits lasted from December, 2007 to January, 2008

Tools of Data Collection

Interviews

A Structured interview format was used to collect data from participants. In all cases, the interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed later to facilitate data analysis.

Audio Recording

All interviews were recorded on tape. This was to ensure accurate data gathering and to facilitate effective data analysis. Furthermore, the rationale for recording the interviews was necessitated by the qualitative perspective that outcomes must be negotiated with participants and triangulated for trustworthiness. The recordings facilitated this requirement by making it possible for participants to listen to their own voices and to confirm or reject certain ideas attributed to them.

Observation

Apart from the interviews I actually went on “site seeing tours” in the offices of the participants. This enabled me to have informal conversations with other personnel of Quality Assurance Units / Directorates that participated in the investigation. Some of these conversations confirmed ideas that the main participants had expressed thus providing the requirement of triangulation and enhancing the credibility of such ideas. Besides, these tours enabled me to see some of the pieces of equipment that were in the Directorates / Units, and even in some cases to see a demonstration of how they worked. An example of this was the machine that marked multiple choice questions.

Member check

Member check is a very important concept in conducting qualitative research. Yemeh (2004 : 74) states as follows, “Qualitative researchers often use member check as a strategy of triangulation” (Janesick, 2000; Schacter & Gass, 1996). One way to do member check is to have the participants review their interview recordings. Janesick (1998b) observed that “implicit in the member check directive, however, is the psychometric assumption that the trinity of validity, generalizability, and reliability, all terms from the quantitative paradigm, are to be adhered to in research” (p. 323). Janesick feels that qualitative researchers should use terminology that is appropriate to their field in discussing member check. The use of this technique learnt rigor to this investigation.

Data Analysis

In compliance with the tenets of qualitative research, transcription and analysis were ongoing. Recorded interviews were normally transcribed within a few days of the interview, and since these were relatively short interviews analysis followed within a few days of the transcription. The inductive approach was mainly used and the concern was primarily with discovery and description and the analysis was presented mainly in the narrative rather than in the numerical form (Cobb and Hagemaster, 1987). In the inductive approach the researcher only knows things as they immerse in context, since no a priori theories are used. As stated elsewhere, outcomes were negotiated with participants and triangulated for trustworthiness.

An important principle of some qualitative researches that underlies this study is the assertion that, "There is no single truth but multiple realities" (Gay, 2000). This also explains why member check was used to ensure that data collected from participants was accurately presented and analyzed.

Findings / Implications

This section is discussed under the following sub topics:

- Origins of Quality Assurance
- Staffing
- Major Achievements
- Major Challenges
- Implications: Advice on Excellence
- Summary
- Recommendations

The Origins of Quality Assurance in Ghana

At the end of the investigation the following findings related to the study of Quality Assurance in Ghana. The data revealed that the six public universities in Ghana made various attempts at ensuring good quality in their academic programmes since they were established. However, not all such efforts were based on the parameters recognized by a well co-ordinated Quality Assurance system. The data suggests that the hall mark of deliberate Quality Assurance programme in an institution is the establishment of the Quality Assurance Unit/ Directorate, with the appointment of a Director and other staff, the provision of office accommodation and the provision of office equipment and relevant resources.

The earliest effort at deliberate Quality Assurance seemed to have been made by one of the member institutions in 2002. According to

the director of this institution what had existed was the planning unit, which operated under the VC's office. However, in October 2002 the VC restructured the planning unit and it was then called the Quality Assurance and Planning Unit. The unit housed Quality Assurance, Strategic Planning and Data Management. Additionally, they dealt with applications and admissions.

This was closely followed by other institutions in 2003, 2005 and 2006. In at least three Institutions Quality Assurance was amalgamated to other previously separate units.

Staffing

The strength of staff varied among member institutions. An institution that seemed to have the largest number of workers had the following categories:

One Quality Assurance Officer (Director)

Four Senior Members

Two Programmers

One Messenger

One Senior Administrative Assistant

One National Service person

(A total of 10 workers)

It is noteworthy that this was the first institutions to start operating a Quality Assurance system in 2002.

Major Achievements

The six public universities achieved varying degrees of success in operating their Quality Assurance systems. In one case it was stated that, "Hardly any success had been achieved".

In some other cases modest achievement were acknowledged. It seems that one of the institutions which had done very well could boast of the following achievements:

- Designed own scannable sheets in their own printing press.
- Finished assessing teaching and went on to service delivery:
 - * College registrars
 - * Accountants
 - * Deans
- Gave feedback to students: (Students must know about the learning environment:)
 - * audio visuals
 - * p. a. systems
 - * LCDs

- Invited to Nigeria for presentation at a Quality Assurance workshop.

Another area of success was the organization of workshops. Three institutions had organized workshops for newly recruited and young lecturers. The relatively successful institution mentioned above could again boast of the following achievements:

- The Unit wrote and won a proposal for the acquisition of two machines from Data and Research Services at the United Kingdom. These machines helped with marking and managing the university's database.
- The Unit organized a workshop and developed a handbook on how to set Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs).

Crucial Resources

The adequate availability of resources is very important for the effective operation of a Quality Assurance System. This assertion is supported by the following remark that one of the directors made: "You cannot hold staff accountable if you do not provide them with the necessary equipment to work with". Among the six public universities of Ghana resources of the Quality Assurance Directorate/ Units varied tremendously. While a couple could hardly boast of any equipment, a couple were relatively well off. The Quality Assurance Units/ Directorates of each of these universities had one or two computers and access to a scanner. However, two were almost content with their resources. One institution had access to almost everything it needed to function. This institution had the following resources.

- Six members of staff
- Six computers/ laptops
- Two I. D. Card producing machines
- One server – Database for the whole institution
- Two pick-up trucks (Nissan & Toyota)

Major Challenges

One major challenge that seemed to confront all the Quality Assurance Units was acceptability. All the Directors were of the view that the majority of university communities viewed Quality Assurance Directorates/ Units with suspicion. Data from Quality Assurance systems of the institutions studied highlighted the suspicion of the university community with regard to the intentions of Quality Assurance. While some people perceived Quality Assurance as fault-

finding, others referred to it as a policeman. The result of this attitude was that some people were reluctant to accept Quality Assurance.

Secondly, the data revealed that in one institution some senior members, particularly those about to go on pension did not care about student evaluation of lecturer effectiveness. The participants of this institution stated, "good but arrogant ones such as those about to go on pension don't care."

Thirdly, lack of motivation among Quality Assurance staff was identified as a reason why members of staff were not doing their best. It was reported in one institution that Quality Assurance staff believed that they had more work to do than workers in other departments. These workers therefore needed extra motivation to perform their duties whole-heartedly. However, this motivation was not forth coming.

Finally, one major challenge in most of the institutions studied was lack of resources. Quality Assurance systems needed personnel and equipment to function optimally. For example, people with a good grasp of ICT are needed. Further, internet connectivity is required. Besides scannable machines are needed to mark assignments and examination scripts. Additionally, office space and means of transport were resources that some Quality Assurance units lacked.

Only one Quality Assurance system came close to having all the crucial resources. However, even here regular maintenance and timely replacement of outdated equipment were identified as problems.

Implications: Advice on Excellence in a Quality Assurance system

The last item on my interview schedule was *advice on excellence*. Everyone I interviewed offered me some advice. What seemed to be of extreme importance was *acceptability*. The data suggested that people were at first skeptical about the intensions of the Quality Assurance Unit/ Directorate. In a few institutions the Quality Assurance systems made some initial mistakes by publishing the results of their evaluation of lecturer effectiveness. Off course, these led to outbursts and the Quality Assurance units apologized re-assessed of their modes of operation. Another piece of advice that the Quality Assurance Directors all seemed to agree on was *following laid down channels and procedures*. It emerged that Quality Assurance systems were located in the VC's offices, which funded them. The Quality Assurance Directors therefore worked closely with the VCs and Pro VCs. All the Directors contacted advised close interaction with the VC, the Pro VC and the

Registrar before taking issues to the Academic Board and similar organs of the university. It is of interest that some of the Directors were members of the Academic Board and also sat on Appointments and Promotions meetings as well as meeting regarding admissions.

The final piece of advice was that “the issue of quality should be reported from the grass root, that is the department and the faculty. We cannot site the Quality Assurance Unit in the VCs office that only gives instructions down ... I would encourage the possible use of the Quality Assurance committee ... In most cases, the Pro VC is the Chairman of the Committee. The committee develops policies and the Director ensures that they are adhered to.” This person added that Quality Assurance should be a collective effort, and that a Quality Assurance Unit should not be regarded as a police office.

Finally, advice was given on effective change carefully, as reflected in the following caution by one of the participants:

In every human institution when you introduce new things you are likely to encounter resistance.... Some will view the innovation as a tool for finding fault with people to be penalized. But you have to sensitize them to understand that the Quality Assurance System is not a fault finding mechanism.

Plans

This investigation discovered that most of the universities involved in this study had plans to deal with problems they had encountered and to improve the Quality Assurance System. For example on institution had plans to rank the departments and to prepare them to be ready with information for the National Accreditation Board visitation. Some are also planning to select “good” teachers to serve as mentors to younger lecturers. Another institution is planning to install security cameras on campus.

SUMMARY

This report is the outcome of a country-wide investigation of Quality Assurance systems. The main purpose of the study was to generate qualitative data to guide the founding of a solid Quality Assurance system in the University of Education of Winneba.

Using four research questions as a guide, interviews were conducted with Quality Assurance Directors and Association of African Universities personnel. The data revealed that the formal establishment of Quality Assurance systems in Ghanaian public Universities dates back to 2002. The data also indicated that one university had not yet started a

Quality Assurance unit and one had made giant strides. The other four recorded varying degrees of success on these two extremes.

With regard to the achievements some universities have been assessing teaching and learning effectiveness as well as management. Additionally, some institutions had participated in international workshops. On overall in Quality Assurance, data overwhelmingly suggested a grassroots approach, ownership by the departments and systematic following of laid down channels and procedures. The challenges included lack of resources, suspicion by the University community, inadequate funding and accommodation.

The question of how to establish Quality Assurance at UEW (Question number 4) is the most important in conduction this research and the following recommendations suggest the way forward:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide adequate office accommodation and equipment so that the staff can work well. Also, the Director needs sufficient time to work, as the following piece of advice suggests, "If you really want to make an impact, I'll advise that you better don't teach. Concentrate on Quality Assurance so that you can make the impact"
2. Design a questionnaire to collect data from the UEW community on their views about Quality Assurance. For example, the VC, Pro VC, Registrar, Deans, Directors and Heads of Departments, Distance Learning Co-ordinators and Assistant Registrars
3. Organize a series of workshops to conscientize UEW community about Quality Assurance. At one of such workshops the Quality Assurance Unit must provide detailed guidelines for a self assessment report by each department. This report must include an analysis of each departments teaching, learning and research. (The guidelines should have been approved by relevant university committees and the academic board). At another workshop ICT personnel should teach lecturers basic skills.
4. It is recommended that quality assurance desks be setup in each department to run the system and to report to the Director of Quality Assurance as well as attend quality assurance meetings.
5. The Quality Assurance Unit might be amalgamated with other units such as planning, MIS and the unit responsible for workshops as pertains in other member institutions with the

National Quality Assurance Committee. This entity might be called the Quality Assurance and Planning Directorate.

6. Visits by personnel from the Quality Assurance Unit to potential mentor universities such as Birmingham, London, Georgia at Athens and Cambridge to learn more about Quality Assurance.

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Awoyemi, M. O. (2006). Evaluating the quality of University teaching. *Quality Assurance: Control in Higher Education (1)*, 49 -56

Ekhaguere, G. O. S. (2000). *Quality Assurance Guide. Association of African Universities*

APPENDIX I

Possible workshop facilitators

Prof. Dolphyne
Prof. Anamuah Mensah
Rev. Dr. Afful Broni
Dr. Kankam
Mrs. Mary Accumey
Mr. Dery from UCC
Mr. Paul Effa from NCTE
Prof. Sefa Dede from Legon

Suggested remuneration - GH¢100.00 / hr

APPENDIX II

Questionnaire for the following

The VC
The Pro VC
The Registrar
The Finance Officer
The Deans
The Directors / Heads of Departments
The Librarian
The Lecturers
The Assistant Registrars
The Senior Administrative Assistant
The Clerks and Typists
The Transport Section
The Security
Grounds and Gardens
The Estate Section
Development Office
The FO
The Deputy FO
The Audit
Labourers

